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Opens after wanted man, hostage taken into custody

August 22, 2008 | By ANDREW SCHOTZ and ERIN JULIUS

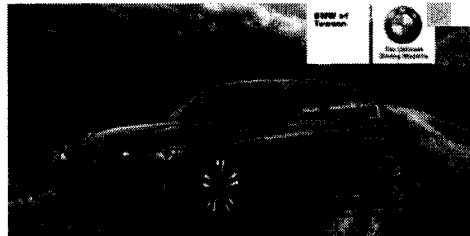
U.S. 522 slideshow of the hostage situation

HANCOCK -- A 45-hour hostage standoff at a Hancock motel ended Friday night when police rushed and grabbed a man who allegedly threatened to kill a woman thought to be his pregnant girlfriend.

Police announced near Americas Best Value Inn about 7:40 p.m. that James A. Prevatt III and Renee Reynolds were in custody, a few minutes after an explosion came from the rear of the property.

A police official later said an explosive device was set off to help officers get inside Prevatt's motel room from the back, as other officers, who had shot him with a Taser electronic device, broke in through the front door.

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Prevatt, 26, and Reynolds, 21, were taken to Washington County Hospital. Reynolds was listed in good condition at the hospital Friday night. Prevatt already had been examined and no longer was there.

No criminal charges had been filed as of Friday night as authorities were sorting through what happened. Washington County Deputy State's Attorney Joseph Michael said Reynolds is not being considered a hostage.

However, Prevatt made numerous threats of violence and about bombs, said Greg Shipley, a Maryland State Police spokesman.

Michael said late Friday night that Prevatt was being held on a 2000 warrant from Hagerstown and on an extraditable Massachusetts warrant.

After nearly two days during which the U.S. 522 bridge, a main north-south passage, was shut down, the hostage situation came to a sudden end.

Officers in an adjoining motel room ran out and rushed toward Prevatt when he stepped out of his room to pick up a meal delivered by a robotic device, said Maj. Larry Suther of the Baltimore County Police Department, whose tactical team was involved.

"Some younger, quicker police officers" got to Prevatt and used the Taser device on him, causing Prevatt to fall back inside the room, Suther said. The spring-loaded door closed, but four officers broke the door down.

At the same time, other officers set off an explosive device to knock down the back door, Suther said.

Officers apprehended Reynolds, who had fled to the bathroom, then got Prevatt, who had fallen behind a door, Suther

said. He estimated the rush and capture took between 10 and 15 seconds.

For some, the hostage situation brought back memories of a 97-hour standoff in Baltimore County in 2000. Joseph Palczynski had killed four people before he took three others hostage, according to news reports. Police eventually broke in and fatally shot Palczynski.

Suther, who was part of the police response in that case, too, said the threats Prevatt made reminded him of Palczynski.

Dozens of officers from police agencies in Hagerstown, Washington County and other parts of Maryland rotated in and out of duty during the two-day standoff in Hancock. State police hostage negotiators spoke to Prevatt through a motel phone.

The hostage situation began Wednesday night. About 10:40 p.m., a state trooper at the Hagerstown barrack received information that Prevatt -- who was wanted on burglary and larceny warrants in four states, including Maryland -- was at the Americas Best Value Inn at 2 Blue Hill Road.

Two troopers and two Washington County Sheriff's Department deputies went to the motel and found out that Prevatt and Reynolds were there.

When they knocked on the door of the room, the lights went out and a man inside told them he would kill his hostage and any police officers who tried to arrest him, authorities said.

Police evacuated guests staying in 12 of the motel's 20 rooms. The guests stayed for several hours in a separate building on the property that serves as an office and lobby. On Thursday, they were taken to the Super 8 motel, although most of their possessions and vehicles still were at the locked-down Americas Best Value Inn.

Shipley said Friday night that Prevatt also made threats against a second woman he claimed was in the room, but only Prevatt and Reynolds were inside.

Prevatt told police he was armed, but officers did not immediately find weapons inside, Shipley said. Police said they obtained warrants to search the room after the standoff was over.

Suther said Baltimore County's police tactical team thought it would have an opportunity to grab Prevatt when he opened his door for a delivered meal.

The dinner on Friday was the fourth time a delivery had been made to the room, Suther said.

On Thursday night, Prevatt was given pizza and soda, but refused to accept it and threatened to shoot the robot, Shipley said.

Other deliveries were for breakfast and cigarettes.

The warrants against Prevatt included one for first-degree burglary in Hagerstown in 2000. The warrant is connected to the theft of electronic equipment from an address on Guilford Avenue.

At the time, Prevatt was living in Hagerstown.

It was not clear where he has been living since then, but authorities said he was incarcerated in Massachusetts until February.

Michael said authorities were trying to confirm that Reynolds is the same person wanted on a warrant for petty theft in South Carolina.

Prevatt and Reynolds have had "an association" with the Washington County area, off and on, for about a month, Michael said.

Hancock Mayor Daniel A. Murphy said the standoff was a great inconvenience, but many volunteers pitched in to help provide food and drinks for police officers and care for the displaced motel guests.

U.S. 522 reopened late Friday night.

Staff writers Marlo Barnhart and Erin Julius contributed to this story.

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